

The Importance of Church Membership.

THE church is of high origin. It is of God. It is of priceless value. Its establishment cost the blood of Christ. It is held in high esteem, for Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Eph. 5: 25. The church is the kingdom of God, and his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." Isa. 9: 7.

It is important to become a member of the church, for in the church is salvation. We have no promise of salvation out of it. We get into the church through Christ. We cannot enter in any other way. "By me if any man enter in he shall be saved." John 10: 9. We enter the church in Christian baptism and if we are in Christ we are in the church. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Eph. 3: 27.

If we leave the church we leave Christ. In the struggle for eternal life, the crown is to him that holds out faithful to the end. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. 2: 10. In the church we learn the great lesson of perseverance,—a faithful continuance in well-doing. It is there that we learn the lesson of brotherly love and brotherly forbearance. Without the church there could be no preparation for heaven. We would lack life's discipline,—the struggle of the newborn soul for victory over the world. There would be no means of growth in knowledge and spiritual life, no life of separation from the world, no means of self-denial, of bringing into subjection all that is evil in human nature and developing all that is good.

In the church there is communion with God, union with Christ, and fellowship with the saints. The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth," and holds up before the world the pure Word of God, and invites sinners to come to Christ the way of salvation. It is the church that sends out God's faithful ministers and sustains their labors by her example in obeying the commandments of God, and in maintaining the principles of the Gospel of Christ. Each member has a part in this great work, and as each one gives and as each one does so shall be his reward. It is a work for Christ who gave himself for the church. In the church "we are laborers together with God;" then, as God gives the means and the power to do, each one should use them and not withhold them.

The church is an organization complete within itself. All her members receive her care, her love, her protection. All who join the church must come out from the world and be a separate people. God has put within the church all that is good, all that is needful for man's happiness here and hereafter. In the church the soul is fed with the Bread of Life; and the thirsty soul may drink the Water of Life. Within her embrace is life, and liberty, and exercise for all that is lawful, and pure, and holy.

The first step towards the church is a step towards heaven. The first step from the church is a step towards sin and death. Sin degrades, seeks lower levels—the level of the world that lieth in sin. Some are drawn away by a desire to dress after the fashion of the world. That desire is sinful; God would not have us decorate the body that shall die, but he would have us adorn the soul with Christian graces. Others are enticed into the meshes of some secret order where they spend their time and means to the furtherance of the kingdom of darkness. Then others, becoming restless under the restraints which Christ has thrown around his people for their protection from the inroads of the world, the flesh and the devil, seek more liberty in ways where the cross of Christ is not felt, and they need not bear his yoke.

Published by the Brethren's General Missionary and Tract Committee, Elgin, Ill.; price, 18 cents per 100. **Order No. 329.**

